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THE OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF ADMIRAL TOGO

by

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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ABSTRACT of

THE OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF ADMIRAL TOGO

Operational leadership is the linchpin of the concept of Operational Art. A theoretical portrait of operational leadership can be drawn by coalescing the common traits of great leadership expressed by several important military writers. The writings of Clausewitz, Sun Tzu, Keegan, and the Joint Military Operations curriculum provide the basis for this view of Operational Leadership. This amalgamated model consists of attributes which can be categorized as either tangible, intangible, or combination. This prototype also provides a framework with which to study the operational leadership characteristics of great historical Operational Leaders; in this case the venerable Admiral Togo of Russo-Japanese War fame is analyzed. Additionally, dissecting operational leadership in this manner allows us to understand that the complex interactive nature of these leadership traits makes great operational leadership an elusive, frail art form of its own. Furthermore, this analysis provides valuable lessons learned for serving and aspiring operational leaders.

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I. Introduction: Operational Leadership - the Art Form

Operational Leadership, the most critical segment of Operational Art, is in itself a complex and elusive art form. A review of Clausewitz's portrait of "Military Genius", Sun Tzu's description of the "Exemplary Commander", Keegan's "continuum of leadership styles", and the characteristic traits of Operational Leadership as presented in the Joint Military Operations curriculum elicits many analogous qualities which serve to narrow the depiction of the great operational leader. This amalgamated portrayal suggests specific attributes of a great operational leader which can be classified within one of three categories: tangible, intangible, or a combination. Following an explanation of this coalesced model of leadership, an analysis of Admiral Togo, Commander in Chief (CINC) of Japan's Combined Fleet during the Russo-Japanese War, will be presented as an example of a great operational leader and will highlight the path he took to achieve this status.

Tangible Attributes The tangible attributes of leadership are considered to be malleable by the organization and the individual. In other words these are traits which can be influenced over time to the benefit of the leader in attaining operational goals. Given enough time to develop, these traits are controllable so it is critical to foment their progression continually during peacetime. The tangible aspects of the model appear benignly obvious at first thought, but that is because their importance to great leadership has been long acknowledged and these facets of leadership are recognized as able to be developed.

The tangible concerns a successful operational leader must pursue are: personal professional training and education, and realistic training for his subordinates. This is most candidly addressed by Sun Tzu: "If officers are unaccustomed to rigorous drilling they will

be worried and hesitant in battle. If generals are not thoroughly trained they will inwardly quail when they face the enemy."¹ Additionally, the importance of education is related in NWC 4001 in describing study and analysis of past military successes and failures as the way to develop operational thinking throughout the chain of command.

Intangible Attributes The intangible attributes of leadership are presented as abstract because they are defined or dominated by an individual leader's personality and are presumed to be unalterable by short term training or education. The first such trait is boldness. Clausewitz's opinion is clear when he states that "...a distinguished commander without boldness is unthinkable. No man who is not born bold can play such a role, and therefore we consider this quality the first prerequisite of the great military leader."²

Additional intangible personality traits of a great operational leader can be assimilated in terms of initiative, courage, responsibility, self-confidence, tough-mindedness, decisiveness, flexibility, and integrity. Clausewitz sums these traits up as *strength of character* when he writes: "Even with the violence of emotion, judgement and principle must still function like a ship's compass..."³ Sun Tzu is explicit in delineating: "The traits of the true commander are: wisdom, humanity, respect, integrity, courage, and dignity."⁴

Combination Attributes The combination attributes of an operational leader are those attributes which are influenced by the intangible attributes but are able to be honed by proper employment of the tangible attributes. In effect, these combination attributes are the operational leader's application of operational design. Many components of operational design can be viewed as tangible ideas, such as: operational deception, consolidation of success, culminating point, center of gravity, operational fires, and operational reserves.

The intangible aspect of these concrete concepts is the operational leader's decision of when, how, and where to incorporate these concepts into a major operation or campaign.

This theoretical model of a great operational leader is established to definitively reveal that operational leadership is the foundation and cornerstone of operational art. This model also serves to clearly relate operational leadership itself as an art form.

II. An Example: Operational Art as Practiced by Admiral Togo

In 1904-05 Japan defeated Russia in battle in Manchuria on the Liaotung Peninsula and surrounding seas. This first clash between modern European and Asian military powers produced some of the largest and bloodiest land battles ever known, surpassing in scope most battles fought in World War I or World War II. While the land battles were immense, the maritime campaign for command of the sea, fought within a mature maritime theater of operations, was the enabling factor for Japan's success. At sea, steam powered, armored, big-gun battleships met for the first time culminating in the Battle of Tsushima which "was bigger and much more decisive than Jutland."⁵

The diminutive figure responsible for conducting the maritime campaign was Admiral of the Fleet, Count Togo Heihachiro, CINC of Japan's Imperial Combined Fleet. The legendary Admiral Togo has been considered by an American author as being on par with General U.S. Grant for his "modesty and gentleness and loyalty."⁶ Captain Pakenham, a British naval attache attached to Togo's flagship throughout the war, favorably compared Togo's operational decision-making to that of Admiral Horatio Nelson.⁷ After the war, Japan "seized every opportunity to glorify the living idol" and Togo was rewarded with a high government position and the title of Count and then Marquis.⁸

Admiral Togo is by all counts considered a great operational leader. In light of the theoretical portrayal of a great operational leader presented above, the following will compare the theoretical model with Togo's actual leadership traits.

Togo's Tangible Attributes. As far as the tangible attributes of the theoretical model go, Togo fits the mold very well. Togo was chosen early in his career as one of twelve young officers to train for three years in Portsmouth, England aboard the British naval training ship *Worcester*. Great Britain was by far the leading naval power of the time and Togo took advantage of every opportunity presented him to further his knowledge of naval warfare. The Captain of the *Worcester* described Togo as: "... an excellent fellow. He was not what you would call brilliant, but a great plodder, slow to learn, but very sure when he had learnt; and he wanted to learn everything! ...He was one of the best sailors the *Worcester* has ever turned out."⁹ Togo's professional education and training continued throughout his career and he was an accomplished student of Admiral Mahan of the United States Navy and Admiral Markarov of the Imperial Russian Navy. Togo had Markarov's book Sea Warfare translated into Japanese when Togo was the director of the naval college and he purportedly read it often even as an Admiral. In fact, "in all his [Togo's] travels he kept Markarov's book on naval tactics beside his bunk, until he almost knew it by heart."¹⁰ This proved exceptionally ironic since Markarov later commanded the Russian Asiatic Fleet in the Russo-Japanese War and was killed in action with Togo.

A large part of Admiral Togo's success can be attributed to relentless training and exercises, dominated by Togo's forceful personality which inculcated realism. Prior to the war with Russia and just after his appointment as CINC, Togo took the Fleet to sea in the

area where he predicted battle would occur and rigorously trained all components. Training included amphibious operations, torpedo firings, long range/high speed gun firing, and Command and Control maneuvers with wireless telegraphy (then in its infancy).¹¹ All aspects of this training would be put to use against the Russian Fleets. The Admiral also used training for a higher purpose. He instilled in his commanders the idea that battles took place between men using ships and not between ships themselves.¹² This mind set ensured that his ships kept fighting even after sustaining major damage. Admiral Togo's strength of conviction toward training and military preparation is summed up in his statement after the decisive Battle of Tsushima: "We, too, studied the art of war and trained ourselves in it, but it was put to use for only that short period. Though the decisive battle took such a short time, it required ten years of preparation."¹³

Togo's Intangible Attributes. Admiral Togo's reactions to the various stages of the maritime campaign of the Russo-Japanese War provide tremendous insight into Togo's personality. There were several underlying assumptions, some contradictory, which guided Togo throughout the war. He knew that he had limited resources since Japan did not have the shipbuilding capability to replace capital ships. He knew that while the Russian Asiatic Fleet was numerically equal to his own Fleet, Russia possessed other Fleets and the capacity to build capital ships, putting time on the side of the Russian Navy. Togo also knew that his ships provided the only means of external defense of the Japanese home islands. Most importantly, Togo knew that Japan could not win the war with Russia if he did not maintain command of the sea and protect Japan's sea lines of communication to the Liaotung Peninsula.

Boldness & Initiative. Boldness, best displayed through assumption of risk, is an interesting attribute which can make or break an operational leader depending on his ability to judge the timing and severity of risk to assume. As Sir Basil Liddell Hart said: "The habit of gambling contrary to reasonable calculations is a military vice which, as the pages of history reveal, has ruined more armies than any other causes."¹⁴ Admiral Togo was quite adept at choosing the quantity of risk to accept at any given time. This was clearly displayed in Togo's risk assessment and risk acceptance after his third, partially successful, attempt to sink concrete laden blockships in the entrance to Port Arthur. The entire course and timing of the war was dependent upon his ability to secure the Russian Fleet in Port Arthur, and even though the channel remained partially clear, after evaluating Russian morale and readiness Togo boldly gave the go-ahead to the amphibious landings anyway. Additionally, the two main fleet engagements of this war, the Battle of the Yellow Sea against Admiral Vitgeft and the Battle of Tsushima against Admiral Rozhdestvenski, saw a bold Togo accept considerable risk to his forces in order to achieve his operational aims. In both situations, even though facing a superior number of battleships, Togo readily understood the long term implications to Japan's war effort if he did not defeat the opposing fleets. The survival of Vitgeft's forces coupled with either the Vladivostok or Baltic Fleets would give command of the sea and probable victory to Russia. Therefore, he knew, "Whatever the risk, Togo had to fight."¹⁵ Against Rozhdestvenski, Togo had to gamble on which route the Russian Fleet would take to Vladivostok. For this famous sea battle to occur, "Togo had gambled everything on his judgement....The whole character of the war would change again."¹⁶

Clausewitz considered boldness the most important quality of a great leader and

Admiral Togo certainly was a bold risk taker. However, Togo's boldness was always supplemented by rational calculation and anticipatory initiative which further enhanced his confidence to take risks. Togo's surprise opening shots of the war on the ships in Port Arthur are an excellent example of Togo employing a bold move to achieve initiative. Even though the Russian ships incurred only minor material damage in this action, Togo's boldness served to debilitate Russian naval leadership for most of the campaign. Prior to the Battle of the Yellow Sea Admiral Vitgeft attempted, with a superiority of battleships, to break through the Japanese blockade but when he met Togo's fleet he avoided battle and returned to the safety of Port Arthur. Vitgeft's reaction is credited to the personal honor of Togo. "Here were Togo and a Russian Admiral face to face. The man Vitgeft quailed and retired before the man Togo."¹⁷

There are several other examples of Togo employing initiative which later allowed for his calculated boldness. When he first heard that Rozhdestvenski's fleet was preparing to depart the Baltic, Togo ordered one thousand mines to block Vladivostok and Port Arthur so that he could engage this new threat. Although Port Arthur had fallen by the time Rozhdestvenski arrived in theater, the previously ordered mines were crucial in blocking the Vladivostok fleet which allowed Togo to recall Admiral Kamimura from Vladivostok blockade duty to assist in the Battle of Tsushima.

In the area of command and control Admiral Togo showed tremendous initiative which gave him the flexibility to be bold throughout the campaign. Prior to the start of the war Togo had an undersea cable laid from his home port in Sasebo to the Hakko-ho Islands off of Korea which he used as a forward base throughout the campaign. Also prior to the

war, Togo specifically discussed with the Japanese General Staff the idea of taking and maintaining the initiative against the Russians, a concept he never lost.

Courage & Responsibility. Clausewitz delineates two types of courage: "courage in the face of personal danger, and courage to accept responsibility..."¹⁸ Togo readily stands up to both of Clausewitz's tests of courage. Togo was a member of the bushido or samurai, which itself characterized many of the facets of operational leadership, especially personal courage. Given Togo's penchant for exposing himself to danger and putting his flagship in the most precarious battle position as an example to his subordinates, Keegan would classify Togo in the mold of the "heroic leader."¹⁹ Togo led his Fleet in person, and was cautioned many times by subordinates to take cover during fire. Togo's ability to withstand withering fire unharmed served to enhance his aura of invincibility and further motivated his subordinates. Although Togo subjected himself to danger he was not irresponsible about it. Togo "indoctrinated his flag officers with his plans, but when the clash came he would not remain aloof...rather he was like a cavalry leader galloping at the head of his premier troop...leaving the flank charges to trusted subordinates."²⁰

Togo's courage to accept responsibility was best displayed early in the war when he was tasked to contain the Russian Fleet in Port Arthur to allow the troop transport ships to land unimpeded on the eastern Liaotung Peninsula. Since he could not attack the Russian ships in the inner harbor without subjecting his capital ships to the port's fortifications, Togo made three attempts to obstruct the channel with blockships. While all three attempts were only partially successful Togo declared the port blocked and accepted responsibility for his Fleet to restrain the Russian ships in Port Arthur.²¹

Self-Confidence, Tough-Mindedness, and Decisiveness. Togo coupled complete self-confidence with a total lack of arrogance. This was most obvious when he faced adversity. After the three unsuccessful blockship attempts to seal off Port Arthur, Togo simply redoubled his efforts, confident the Russians could not get past him. Similarly, when he lost two of his six battleships to mines, Togo simply "irradiated renewed confidence that all would be well..."²² Given the diverse circumstances of this maritime campaign from blockade duty to major fleet engagement, Togo has been described as "an ideal leader for this campaign because he had the repose and self-control to govern the operations during the periods of endless waiting, and when the time came to fight, he had the mastery to wield his weapon with the fiery might of a self-confident veteran."²³

The varying nature of the campaign again provides a good idea of Togo's tough-mindedness. He always understood what his goal was at any given time and remained firm in his convictions about how to attain that goal. At the beginning of the war Togo knew he could not risk his capital ships because with the loss of his ships the war would be lost. Therefore, he used destroyers and torpedoes to conduct the opening attack on the Port Arthur Fleet even though he was initially ridiculed as being timid and inactive. However, after Port Arthur fell and the sea lines were secure, Togo was single-minded in his determination to carry out his new priority of defeating the approaching Russian Fleet which had departed the Baltic six months earlier.

Flexibility. Togo's possession of this attribute was critical in confounding the Russian Fleet Commanders. "Togo had to make his very limited supply of warships perform a multiplicity of functions and there were no orthodox rules to follow."²⁴ His ability to be flexible was

founded on Togo's capacity to delegate authority to his commanders and trust in their expertise and judgement to understand and carry out Togo's intent. Togo was flexible with his paucity of assets yet was still able to control the Vladivostok Fleet while defeating the Port Arthur Fleet. Additionally, Togo willingly took suggestions from his staff and used every conceivable option available to him in dealing with the Port Arthur Fleet.

Integrity. The final intangible attribute to be discussed is integrity. Integrity is best described as the glue that holds the concept of leadership together. Within the scope of this attribute Togo was flawless. His personal examples of dedication, decorum, and bravery are still heralded in Japan today. He has been described as, " a gentleman in the finest sense..." and "...temperamentally incapable of lifting a finger to gain the slightest preferment for himself and that the trappings and kudos of exalted station were subordinated in his common sense to an awareness of obligation and a compulsion towards proficiency."²⁵

Togo's Combination Attributes. A superb historical example of combination leadership traits is characterized by Admiral Togo's ability to employ the concepts of operational design. As shown below, Togo consciously implemented the tenets of deception, success consolidation, culminating point, center of gravity, operational fire, and reserves in his operational plans.

Sun Tzu's concept that, "All warfare is based on deception." was not lost on Admiral Togo.²⁶ Deception was a major consideration in every action the Combined Fleet took during the campaign beginning with the night time surprise attack on Port Arthur. Togo's use of operational deception continued throughout the Port Arthur siege by employing specific ship maneuvers and feints to try to lure the Russian Fleet out from the safety of Port Arthur's guns in order to force a major engagement. This was most successful against

Admiral Markarov by luring him out into a mine field killing Markarov and sinking his flagship. Also, Togo planted dummy mines outside Port Arthur to force the Russians to waste their ammunition while Togo kept real mines for later decisive employment. Another form of deception was Togo's ability to hide the fact that he had lost not one, but two of his six battleships to Russian mines. Togo's ability to keep the sinking of *Yashima* secret for a year impacted operational employment of the Port Arthur Fleet. These successful instances of deception were specifically employed to aid Togo's operational aim of defeat of the Port Arthur Fleet.

Admiral Togo was very aggressive in consolidating any and all successes achieved while limiting any Russian consolidation of success. Togo effectively used the confusion caused by the initial surprise attack to continue daily raids. After Vitgeft was defeated, Togo returned to Port Arthur with larger forces immediately and even conducted daring daytime torpedo attacks to maintain the initiative. Additionally, "Togo sensed the effect of Markarov's death upon the Russian morale and he pressed the advantage" with increased naval gunfire.²⁷

The concept and anticipation of both friendly and enemy culminating points guided Togo's operational planning. He understood the potential of Russia's divided fleets and his necessity to prohibit their consolidation which would give Russia command of the sea. Russia, being a continental power, could only lose the war on land; while Japan, being a maritime power, could lose the war on land or sea. Thus, Togo knew that major damage to his fleet would be a strategic culminating point resulting in Russian victory.

Since Japan could only win the war on land, Togo knew that Japan's center of gravity

was its army. However, Japan had a strategic vulnerability in its sea lines of communication for which the Combined Fleet was the only protection. Russia, being able to win the war on land or sea, possessed two strategic centers of gravity: its army and its navy. Thus Togo had to contend with simultaneously protecting the major vulnerability of Japan's center of gravity while defeating a major Russian center of gravity. This was a monumental task which summoned all of Togo's leadership capability.

The use of operational fire and operational reserves were also well managed by Admiral Togo. Destroyers, torpedoes, mines, and blockships were used as untraditional operational fires because of Togo's requirement to conserve his capital ships. Togo was also very careful to always have an operational reserve of capital ships nearby during his attempts to lure the Port Arthur Fleet to battle. His use of reserves was critical in defeating Admiral Vitgeft in the Battle of the Yellow Sea.

III. The Making of a Great Operational Leader

An operational leader by definition, can not be ascribed to greatness, infamy, or any median point without being tested in battle. Officers who may be put in the role of operational leader are promoted and assigned because they seem to possess the required traits but success is never guaranteed. As Clausewitz wrote: "Everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing a kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war..."²⁸ No amount of war gaming, simulation, or planning will guarantee the effectiveness of an operational leader once the fog and friction of battle ensue. In effect, this is saying that great operational leaders are defined by operational success and therefore can only be judged after the fact.

The frailty of great operational leadership during a campaign is well illustrated in the case of Admiral Togo. Throughout the maritime campaign, there are several instances where the fog and friction of war seemed to "luckily" go Togo's way. For instance, the Port Arthur Fleet was assigned a "risk nothing" policy which perfectly fit Togo's policy of capital ship protection and attrition of Russian ships. The outcome of the maritime campaign might have changed considerably had a capable, aggressive leader like Markarov led the Port Arthur Fleet from the beginning. Other Russian operations that may have been successful are aggressive use of the Vladivostok Fleet to further divide Togo's fleet and employment of midget submarines to defeat Togo as suggested by the Russian Naval Staff. Also, in the Battle of the Yellow Sea, Togo has been credited with victory because two "lucky" twelve inch gun hits disabled the Russian flagship which threw the Russian battle line into confusion.

The real issue here is whether a great operational leader may improve his luck through the use of all of the attributes of a great leader or is luck an external intangible. Field Marshall von Moltke clearly thinks, "Luck in the long run is given only to the efficient."²⁹ Alternatively, Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall says: "there is such a thing as luck, and as soldiers you have to believe in it."³⁰ It is fairly clear in the case of the Russo-Japanese War that Admiral Togo's "luck" was predetermined by great leadership.

IV. Summary

Great operational leadership is a personal, precarious characterization which will vary by individual and circumstance. While operational leadership is the foundation of Operational Art, it is in itself an art and therefore is difficult to identify and judge until after

successful completion of a campaign or major operation. The honing of operational leadership may only be enhanced directly by improving the tangible attributes. The intangible attributes are culture, personality, and upbringing based and can not be decisively "corrected." Combination attributes are the operational leader's outlet to employ his intangible attributes as assisted by tangible attributes in the successful prosecution of his goals.

V. Lessons Learned

The following lessons learned apply:

--**Operational leadership sets the tone of a campaign.** Admiral Togo's leadership attributes were personified by all commanders in every action in which the Combined Fleet was engaged. Togo ensured through his demeanor and actions that every commander and sailor alike understood the vital nature of the Combined Fleet's success. In the Russo-Japanese War, Togo's operational leadership was the decisive factor in winning the maritime campaign.

--**Micro-management of an operational commander by his superiors will be detrimental.** Contrasting Togo's campaign plan with the Russian campaign plan readily illustrates this point. Togo was completely in charge, coordinated well with the army, and kept Tokyo informed of his actions. The Russian naval commanders were thwarted by an ill defined chain of command to St. Petersburg and presented with contradictory goals. Today this issue can easily be compounded by the availability of superior communications which enhances the prospect of micro-management.

--**There is no substitute for peacetime readiness.** Operational leaders must ensure

extensive realistic training is conducted continually, and that all participants understand the reasons for conducting the training, a more difficult issue today with the loss of the Soviet Union as a well-defined enemy. With today's expectation of short, intense, high-technology wars there is no time for training after the crisis begins. Thus, today's military draw down creates a real leadership challenge for the operational commander as he must ensure his forces are properly trained and do not become "hollow."

--Leadership can be enhanced but not manufactured. The tangible aspects of leadership provide a foundation for the great operational leader. The intangible attributes provide individual structure to an operational leader's unique reactions in battle. The combination characteristics are the operational leaders outlet to express his leadership during a campaign. Thus, leadership can be improved through education and training, but that will only constitute a partial enhancement. An individual's intangible attributes, the core of an operational leader's decision making capacity, can not be reprogrammed.

--A commander's leadership traits are interactive, influencing one another in shaping a decision. For example, the superior training of Togo's tactical commanders gave him confidence to act boldly. Also, his courage and acceptance of responsibility allowed Togo to be flexible by trusting his commanders to understand and act on his intent. The interaction of these attributes under the pressure of war is what makes great operational leadership such an elusive art form.

NOTES

1. Sun Tzu, The Art of War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), p. 66.
2. Carl von Clausewitz, On War (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 192.
3. Ibid., p. 107.
4. Sun Tzu, The Art of Warfare (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993) p. 226.
5. Denis and Peggy Warner, The Tide at Sunrise (New York: Charterhouse, 1974), p. x.
6. Edwin A. Falk, Togo and the Rise of Japanese Sea Power (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1936), p. vii.
7. Warner, pp. 243-244.
8. Falk, p. 429.
9. Falk, p. 91.
10. Warner, p. 238.
11. Ibid., p. 186.
12. Falk, p. 381.
13. Warner, p. 520.
14. Peter G. Tsouras, Warriors' Words (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, 1992), p. 379.
15. Warner, p. 327.
16. Ibid., p. 497.
17. Ibid., p. 308.
18. Clausewitz, p. 101.
19. John Keegan, The Mask of Command (London: Penguin Group, 1987), p. 13.
20. Falk, p. 382.
21. Nagayo Ogasawara, Life of Admiral Togo (Tokyo: The Seito Shorin Press, 1934), p. 275.

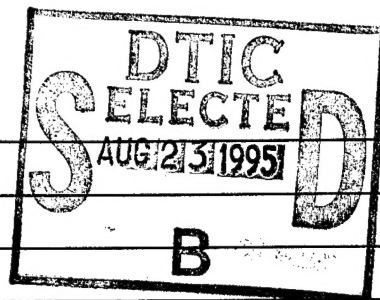
22. Warner, p. 282.
23. Falk, p. 310.
24. Ibid., p. 321.
25. Ibid., p. 283.
26. Michael I. Handel, Masters of War: Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and Jomini (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1992), p. 101.
27. Falk, p. 315.
28. Clausewitz, p. 119.
29. Tsouras, p. 243.
30. Ibid., p. 243.

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